



March 8, 2023

Dawn Crayco

Education Committee

HB 6842: An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Local Food for Schools Incentive Program and Expansion of The CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program

Senator McCrory, Representative Currey, and Connecticut General Assembly members of the Education Committee, my name is Dawn Crayco and I represent the national organization, FoodCorps. I am also a Steering Committee Member of the CT Farm to School Collaborative and resident of Marlborough, Connecticut. I am writing to ask for your support on **HB 6842: An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Local Food for Schools Incentive Program and Expansion of The CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program.**

School Meal Programs are known as the largest restaurant in town. They provide important access to nutrition for students with meals that meet federal and state nutrition guidelines. They are lifelines for families who struggle with food insecurity; 1 in 8 children in our state struggle with access to daily nutrition to meet their needs.

Unfortunately, the \$77 cents to \$4.33 districts (based on student eligibility) receive in federal funds is not always enough to cover the cost of food, labor, supplies, and equipment while preparing kid-appealing, healthy, fresh, and culturally relevant meals. Preliminary results of University of Connecticut survey of 144 Connecticut school districts found that **97% of all respondents are interested in trying to create new menu items that incorporate local (CT-Grown) items. Cost was cited as a top barrier of being able to purchase more local food.** For many districts, the pandemic supply chain issues opened up markets to partner with local farms. Federal waivers that funded free meals for all students provided them with additional funding for meals. With expiring waivers and the surging costs of food (some reporting 20-30% increase in costs), local foods in school meal programs have been some of the first investments compromised in school nutrition programs. A CT Local Food for Schools Incentive program would help decrease the cost barrier and facilitate new local items in school meals programs.

Districts want to put fresh local greens in their salad bar, to offer local roasted carrots during the winter months, or serve up local berries in breakfast yogurt parfaits. Those interviewed in the UConn survey also **overwhelmingly believed that when they served local and fresh produce the students were more likely to eat the fruits and vegetables and enjoyed them more.** For students, knowing who grows their food cultivates community and enables farmers and producers to choose crops and develop products that are culturally relevant to students.



A CT Local Food for Schools Incentive Program provides school districts with funding through an incentive to support the purchase and preparation of locally grown foods in school meal programs:

- Through this program, the state would reimburse a district \$1 for every \$2 they spend on CT Grown Product and \$1 for every \$3 they spend on regionally produced food from New England state and New York. As result, more federal school meal dollars will be redirected to our local economy.
- The program will help addresses inequities by prioritizing purchasing relationships with small and socially disadvantaged farmers opening up and supporting markets for our most marginalized and challenged growers. This also helps show students the importance and diversity of farmers and the potential for a career in agriculture.
- Technical assistance and training for districts and farmers will provide the supports to make the program a success and ensure districts and farmers unique needs are addressed.

Fifteen others states including Maine, Vermont, and New York have local food incentive programs with established results. With Connecticut's strong agricultural economy and community and our districts' commitment to local, we too could reap the educational, public health, economic benefits of a program.

The legislation also includes an intention to continue to fund the successful 2021 CT General Assembly established CT Grown for CT Kids Grants Program. This grants program has a projected impact of reaching over **16,000 students across 31 communities throughout our state with 60% of funding going to Alliance Districts**. In total, close to 2 million dollars in grant funds were requested with less than \$700,000 available for granting in the two-year grant program.

The Grants Program was an incredibly effective and efficient use of funding- the approximate **per student cost was about \$46.00**. This is such a small but significant investment that pays dividends for children across our state who in their youngest years are developing healthy relationships to food and learning how food powers their community. The demand and proof are there; research shows that students in schools with more hands-on learning activities (like garden and cooking classes) consume up to **three times the amount of fruits and vegetables** as students who receive less of that hands-on learning.

As a mom of a three-year-old, I can now speak first hand to how an experience with growing food can transform a child's perception and attitudes around food and influence them to try new things. Less than a year ago, a speck of green herb in a food like rice would cause my son to reject the item. By having him help in our home garden, I caught him on numerous occasions snacking on kale right out of the bed, dirt and all. I truly believe



exposure and education piece goes hand in hand with access to nutritious, fresh school meals.

A Local Food for Schools Incentive Program and CT Grown for CT Kids Grants program is a winning combination that supports both supply and demand for local food in schools: school nutrition programs get the funding they need to source locally and increase the nutritional content and offerings for students and students get hands-on experiences understanding where food comes and having agency in growing and cooking the food. This leads to greater selection in the cafeteria and the excitement this creates helps keep students participating.

Now, more than ever, we understand just how essential schools are for supporting student wellness. Providing schools with the resources they need to increase access to meals, start up or expand local food sourcing and education activities is a win for our kids, our schools, and our communities. I urge you to support these two important initiatives to help Connecticut students and schools to grow and thrive. Thank you for your time and for your service.

Dawn Crayco, MPH
Northeast Regional Policy Director, FoodCorps
Steering Committee Member, CT Farm to School Collaborative
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Attachments:

CT Grown for CT Kids Grantees and Towns

CT Local Food for School Incentive Program Fact Sheet



CT Grown for CT Kids Grantees FY22 & FY23

Grantee	Project Title	Town/City
Regional YMCA of Western CT	Regional Y Gardening Programs	Bethel & Brookfield
Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School	Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet School: Growing, Eating, Learning	Bloomfield
Bright Beginnings of Fairfield, LLC	Bright Beginnings of Fairfield, LLC: Bright Beginnings of Fairfield	Bridgeport
Bristol Public Schools	Bristol Public Schools: Seed to Table	Bristol
Bristol Child Development Center	Bristol Child Development Center: Little Chef	Bristol
Bristol Child Development Center	Little Chefs	Bristol
Brooklyn Elementary School	Brooklyn Elementary School: BES Greenhouse Project	Brooklyn
Cheshire Public Schools	Cheshire Public Schools: Cheshire Greenhouse	Cheshire
Nourish My Soul	Nourish My Soul : Nourish My Soul Farm To School	East Granby
Center Elementary School East Hampton	Center Elementary School East Hampton: Community Greenhouse \$24530	East Hampton
East Hampton Public Schools; Memorial School	Memorial School Garden	East Hampton
West Haven Development Center, Inc	West Haven Development Center, Inc: Onto Stage 2: From Farm to ECE, Expanding Children's Worldview	Glastonbury
Glastonbury-East Hartford Elementary Magnet School	Glastonbury-East Hartford Elementary Magnet School: CREC GEHMS CTG4CTK	Glastonbury/East Hartford
Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA)	Thames Valley Council for Community Action (TVCCA): Promoting Healthy Food Choices: A Partnership between ECE and Local Farmers	Greater New London
Groton Public Schools; Thames River Magnet and Catherine Kolnaski	Growing Groton's Farm to School Program	Groton
KNOX Foundation	KNOX Foundation: Expanding Farm-to-School Program through Education and School Gardens	Hartford
Hartford PS- Environ Sciences Magnet at Mary Hooker	Hartford PS- Environ Sciences Magnet at Mary Hooker: Tasting the Seasons	Hartford
Gardeners to Farmers Greenhouse	Gardeners to Farmers Greenhouse: Farm to School Community	Hartford



Charter Oak International Academy	Charter Oak International Academy: Exploration of our Learning Garden Habitat	Hartford
YWCA Hartford Region, Inc.	YWCA Hartford Region, Inc.: YWCA Hartford Region Early Learning Center Farm-to-School Program	Hartford
Hartford Public High School	Hartford Public High School Greenhouse	Hartford
Lauren Little Edutainment-working at Mary Hooker Environmental Sciences Magnet School	Traveling School Yard Tour Program	Hartford
Sweet Acre Farm	Sweet Acre Farm: Cooler Build	Lebanon
Town of Manchester/ Manchester Early Childhood Collaborative (MECC)	Town of Manchester/ Manchester Early Childhood Collaborative (MECC): MECC Farm-to-School Program	Manchester
Cobblestone Farm	Cobblestone Farm: Scaling Up Root Production	Mansfield
Meriden Public Schools; John Barry Elementary	Creating Equitable Opportunities Through FTS Connection	Meriden
Middletown PS	Middletown PS: Track 2 Experiential Learning	Middletown
Walden Farm	Walden Farm : Farming in Education Technology	Moodus
Hungry Reaper Farm	Hungry Reaper Farm: Wash & Pack Improvement	Morris
All Our Kin, Inc.	All Our Kin, Inc.: Increasing Farm-to-School Initiatives Within Family Child Care Programs	multiple, generally greater new haven though extends to providers in Bridgeport
Sunset Farm	Sunset Farm: Farm to School Wash Station Expansion	Naugatuck
Naugatuck Public Schools	#NaugyGrows	Naugatuck
New Britain ROOTS	New Britain ROOTS: Expanding Farm to School in New Britain	New Britain
New Britain Public Schools; Smith Elementary	Smith School Garden Expansion	New Britain
Common Ground	Common Ground: Increasing Farm-to-School Procurement at Common Ground	New Haven
Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy	Ponus Ridge STEAM Academy: Edible U	Norwalk
Stepping Stones Children Museum	ELLI Classrooms Farm to School Learning Project	Norwalk



Hunts Brook Farm	Hunts Brook Farm: High Tunnel Materials	Quaker Hill
Maple Bank Farm	Maple Bank Farm: Caterpillar Tunnel	Roxbury
Yellow Farmhouse Education Center	Experiential Professional Learning for CT Family & Consumer Science Teachers	Stonington
Thy Neighbors Farm	Thy Neighbors Farm: Season Extension Equipment	Torrington
Diane Matulis/ Creative Kids Daycare	Diane Matulis/ Creative Kids Daycare: CKD Grow box expansion	Torrington
Torrington Public Schools	Torrington Produce Pilot	Torrington
Watertown	Watertown: Watertown Grown 4 Watertown Kids	Watertown
West Haven Child Development Center	Farm to Table: Expanding Preschool Children's Worldview	West Haven
Winchester Public Schools	Winchester School Produce Pilot	Winchester
Alliance District/School Readiness Program		

How a CT Local Food for School Incentive Program Promotes Healthy Kids & Benefits Farms

This issue matters because:



Local food systems have multiple economic benefits: smaller producers keep more of the food dollar when selling to direct markets, and they are more likely to purchase inputs locally, stimulating the local economy.



Shorter supply chains between producers and consumers were more resilient during the pandemic than national distribution networks, shoring up food security and reducing waste.



Knowing who grows your food cultivates community and enables farmers and producers to choose crops and develop products that are culturally relevant to students

“It is important for students to know where their food comes from and for the foods we serve to be culturally relevant to them. In Hartford, we partner with KNOX and Keney Park Sustainability Project to supply local produce. Our students consume more of our produce when they know it is coming from their own backyards.

— **Lonnie Burt, MS, RD, CD-N**
Senior Director of Food & Child Nutrition Services
(Hartford Public Schools)



HOW it would work:

A CT Local Food for Schools Incentive Program provides school districts with funding to support the purchase and preparation of locally grown foods in school meal programs:

- The state will reimburse a district \$1 for every \$2 they spend on CT Grown Product and \$1 for every \$3 they spend on regionally produced food
- More federal school meal dollars will be redirected to our local economy
- The program will help address inequities by prioritizing purchasing relationships with small and socially disadvantaged farmers
- Technical assistance and training for districts and farmers will provide the supports to make the program a success

Want to learn more?

Contact Dawn Crayco, FoodCorps Northeast Regional Policy Director at dawn.crayco@foodcorps.org. Learn more at www.foodcorps.org.

